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SUBJECT: TOKYO MEDIA REACTION - AMBASSADOR ROOS AND SEVEN EMBASSIES
in MEETING WITH JUSTICE MINISTER CHIBA

REF: A) TOKYO 02414 B) TOKYO 2395; C) TOKYO 0040; D) TOKYO 0039; E)
TOKYO 0036; F) TOKYO 0035

¶1. SUMMARY: On October 16 Ambassador Roos and seven other envoys called on Justice Minister Chiba to urge her to accelerate Japan's accession to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. The demarche brought the issue press coverage and increased the pressure on Japan to accede to the Convention. Nevertheless, GOJ officials express concern that accession to the Convention might result in children being returned to abusive foreign parents. Emboffs will continue to educate Japanese officials on the Convention's stipulation that a child need not be returned if he or she would be exposed to harm. END SUMMARY.

¶2. On October 16 Ambassador Roos, ambassadors from Canada, France, Italy, New Zealand, Spain, and the United Kingdom, and the Australian Deputy Head of Mission called on Justice Minister Chiba to urge her to promote Japan's accession to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction(REF A). The demarche was not in immediate response to the arrest of an American father in Fukuoka for trying to bring his children back to the United States, but did take place two days after his release (REFS: B-F) In Japan the Fukuoka case did not attract direct press coverage, but media outlets did report reaction to it in the United States.

¶3. Although the Ministry of Justice had not planned to invite the press to the meeting with the envoys, it opened up the event to a photo spray in response to a request from post's Press Section. On October 17 four morning papers across the political spectrum gave inside-page play to the demarche. The liberal Mainichi reported the ambassadors from the eight participating embassies afterward released a joint press statement that said in part: "It is important to develop tangible solutions to cases of parental child abduction in Japan. We are willing to work closely with the new Japanese government."

¶4. The envoys' meeting with Justice Minister Chiba resulted in detailed press coverage and ratcheted up pressure on Japan to sign the Hague Convention. The conservative Yomiuri in a page-one piece on Oct. 18 and the liberal Asahi in an editorial two days later described the ambassadors' meeting with the minister as part of a crescendo of calls from the international community for Japan's accession to the convention. The Yomiuri article said the growing pressure added momentum in favor of Japan's signing the treaty. Coincidentally, on the day of the demarche, the Yomiuri ran an editorial entitled "Time to study joining treaty on child custody" in which it said: "....the issue has become the cause of diplomatic friction. The government must tackle the issue without delay." The Asahi editorial noted: "The argument that all countries should abide by the rules of the Hague Convention carries conviction...It is probably not realistic for Japan to continue to avoid signing the

Hague Convention."

¶15. Still, Japanese ministers have been reluctant to express a strong commitment to moving Japan in the direction of signing the Hague Convention. "I am aware there are international opinions on this issue," commented Justice Minister Chiba at a news conference on the day of the envoys' visit. "We will deal with this issue according to the prevailing trend." Foreign Minister Katsuya Okada said at a separate news conference: "We would like to consider this issue positively. However, there is the question of how the public will react." The Yomiuri article said Japan would have to amend existing law and pass new legislation in order for the country to accede to the Hague Convention. The newspaper estimated the requisite legislation could not be in place until 2011 at the earliest.

¶16. COMMENT: While pointing out that there is momentum, some articles noted that the GOJ has argued that signing the convention may not protect Japanese women and their children from abusive foreign husbands. GOJ officials have claimed in discussions with embassies that Japanese parents who take children are victims of domestic violence and therefore the GOJ must ensure that the children are not returned to an abusive foreign parent. Although they have not provided evidence in support of this contention, press coverage indicates that this belief appears to be widely held in Japan. The October 16 editorial in the Yomiuri Shimbun pointed out that the Hague Convention "stipulates that a child need not be returned if he or she would be exposed to physical or psychological harm. Serious consideration should be given to this point."

ROOS